

THE BRIEF-NARRATIVE ART OF  
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

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## THE BRIEF-NARRATIVE ART OF THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

When Maxime Du Camp affirms<sup>1</sup> that Gautier is less of a *romancier* than a *conteur*, he is attempting to distinguish between these as between invention and imagination, arguing that whereas a *roman* is composed objectively, upon a deliberate plan, a *conte* or a *nouvelle* is subjective and spontaneous. This distinction, carried to its logical consequences, means that in novels the writer guides the narrative, in brief tales the narrative guides the writer, a reduction to the absurd even if limited to Gautier. For the structural unity of *la Morte amoureuse* is as voluntary as that of *le Capitaine Fracasse*, and vastly superior to that of such novels as *Partie carrée*. Du Camp is manifestly correct in assuming that many of Gautier's briefer tales are the result of musing over adventures, generally erotic, of which the author imagines himself the hero, and there is a degree of reason in his remark that "c'est parce qu'elles ont été un épisode de sa vie intellectuelle que ses nouvelles sont simples, presque sans incidents, émues néanmoins et communiquant l'émotion dont elles palpitent."<sup>2</sup> But this subjectivity is not in itself an adequate explanation of the peculiar singleness of effect of some of the stories, and the question remains by what narrative methods Gautier achieved this.

The ultimate solution should include an appraisal of Gautier's importance in the development of brief fiction in France, but this can be attempted only after such a survey of the entire field as no one has yet made. My immediate purpose is to examine Gautier's tales for themselves and to discover whether he evolved a type or types of any narrative distinction.

In a group of the earlier stories, notably in *la Morte amoureuse* (1836), his methods are comparable to Poe's, although there is no likelihood that at this period Gautier was acquainted with the writings of the American.

Whoever analyzes *la Morte amoureuse* will perceive that it fulfils the short-story requirements later expounded by Poe and so diligently

<sup>1</sup> *Théophile Gautier* (Paris, 1890), pp. 147-52.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

studied by his followers and his critics.<sup>1</sup> Gautier chooses for a theme the *liaison* of a priest and a female vampire and sets out, as the short-story adepts now do, "to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis."<sup>2</sup> His devices for procuring complete harmony are legion. The point of view is constant, for the whole experience is related in the first person by the victim. The initial sentences tend to the outbringing of the preconceived effect, to sounding that note of the uncanny which is constantly to be maintained: "Vous me demandez, frère, si j'ai aimé; oui. C'est une histoire singulière et terrible, et, quoique j'aie soixante-six ans, j'ose à peine remuer le cendre de ce souvenir."<sup>3</sup> The entire first paragraph, summing up the indelible impression made upon the priest, is in the same key, and throughout the tale the note rings out, ever lugubrious.<sup>4</sup> Except for supernumeraries entirely inconspicuous, there are only three characters, the vampire, the priest Romuault, and a brother-priest whose attempts to offer guidance form an essential part of the action. In the matter of descriptions, tabooed in the short-story as foreign to its essence, Gautier, who is notoriously fond of the picturesque, has restrained himself to an unusual degree. The events are simple and decisive, and at turning-points in the story attention is fastened upon the stage of development reached by a terse summarizing phrase.<sup>5</sup> Suspense is brought skilfully to a head by the cumulation of manifestations made to the priest by Clarimonde. When Romuault is summoned to the unfamiliar château, the promptness with which he realizes that he is to see his lady is not only natural but a factor—one of a score—in securing swift progress. The ending is as direct

<sup>1</sup> For an abridged short-story bibliography, cf. my article on "Balzac and the Short-Story," *Modern Philology*, XII, 71, note 3. The famous statement of Poe, part of which is quoted in that note, was written in 1842. The short-story character of *la Morte amoureuse* has already been pointed out by Professor Baldwin, *American Short Stories* (New York, 1909), Introduction, p. 33. In the present article I shall use the term "short-story" only in the restricted American sense.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, *Materials and Methods of Fiction* (New York, 1908), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Nouvelles* (Paris, 1871), p. 261.

<sup>4</sup> Observe the repetition of the idea of a nightmare (*ibid.*, pp. 266, 275, 289); of the apostrophe of Clarimonde: "Malheureux! qu'as-tu fait?" (pp. 267, 268, 295); of the motif of a single fatal glance: "un seul regard . . . jeté sur une femme" (p. 261), "pour avoir levé une seule fois le regard sur une femme" (p. 274), "ne regardez jamais une femme . . . il suffit d'une minute" (p. 295).

<sup>5</sup> Pp. 263, 268, 288.



as the beginning: the *liaison* is broken, Clarimonde bids the priest farewell, "elle se dissipa dans l'air . . . et je ne la revis plus."<sup>1</sup> There follows a paragraph of a few lines which sound for the last time the note of the awfulness of the experience and is simply long enough to save the termination from being brusque, to put the needed period to the whole.

*La Morte amoureuse* was prepared for Balzac's *Chronique de Paris*,<sup>2</sup> and Balzac himself had written a little earlier<sup>3</sup> several tales of salient short-story characteristics, yet neither he nor Gautier in any way suggest that they were aware of the temporary similarity of their narrative processes. A similarity there is, however, and not in the case of *la Morte amoureuse* alone; other stories written by Gautier within a few years preceding 1836 approach the same standard and may be considered tentative efforts at the form finally achieved in 1836.

The first of these is *la Cafetière* (1831). A young man, Théodore, staying at a country house, has a singular adventure during the night, and, like the priest Romuald, he tells of the experience himself. Objects in his room come to life, a porcelain coffee-pot thumps its way from table to hearth, portraits become animated and dance, and the youth, perceiving a charming girl without a partner, joins her. At dawn the spell is broken, the girl falls to the floor, and Théodore, rushing to pick her up, finds only the pieces of the coffee-pot. The exposition is of the briefest, the narrative progress is swift, the attention is focused, first upon the weird group of figures in the room and then, sharply, upon the principal figure, Angéla.<sup>4</sup> A single tone, suggesting the weird and the tragic, prevails as in *la Morte amoureuse*, and is last sounded in the final words of the tale when the hero expresses his—somewhat callow—despair with the remark: "Je venais de comprendre qu'il n'y avait plus pour moi de bonheur sur la terre!"<sup>5</sup> In a tentative version of the first part of the story,

<sup>1</sup> P. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Théophile Gautier* (Paris, 1887), No. 130. The story was divided between two issues of the *Chronique de Paris*. Apparently Gautier had no thought of the advantage which, according to Poe, results from a single, uninterrupted presentation.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. p. 136, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> In 1852 the story was published under the title *Angéla* (Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, No. 45).

<sup>5</sup> *Les Jeunes-France* (Paris: Charpentier), p. 261. In this edition the story is dated, erroneously, 1833.

reproduced from the manuscript by Lovenjoul,<sup>1</sup> there are copious descriptions of no narrative value, and a more cumbersome exposition, and in the fact that this version was rejected there may be a sign of a conscious move to attain a higher degree of unity.

*Onuphrius* (1832) consists of a series of adventures of a young man who gradually becomes insane. The events are related with remarkable imaginative power and are somewhat varied, too varied no doubt to admit classification of the story with the Poe type. But the basic unity is complete. *Onuphrius* has something in common with *le Horla* by Maupassant, a tale worthy of Poe at his best, resembling it closely enough to prove short-story characteristics, differing sufficiently to indicate short-story defects. The experiences in *le Horla* are as diversified, but there results a high degree of unity from the fact that the illusion of the patient is a single one, while that of Onuphrius, except for the recurring hallucination of the demon with the ruby on his finger, varies. The climacteric development in *le Horla* is superior, and the attention is more completely focused on the man and his obsession. *Le Horla* is told in the first person, whereas with Gautier, although the point of view is constant, the third person is used, with consequent diminution, it may be argued, of intensity.<sup>2</sup>

Three other products of the years immediately preceding *la Morte amoureuse* merit a word. Two of them are hardly more than anecdotes. The first, published by Lovenjoul,<sup>3</sup> who without vouching altogether for its authenticity thinks it may be the first piece of fiction ever composed by Gautier (March 24, 1831), is the account of the experience of a young Frenchman in Egypt, compelled to seek the hospitality of a Bedouin camp and discovering that he has eaten of a gazelle roasted over blazing mummies. The next is the story, covering some eight pages in *Sous la Table* (1833),<sup>4</sup> concerning a youth and a *grisette*. The episode is too trivial to warrant serious consideration, yet, its essential narrative structure alone considered—and it is

<sup>1</sup> Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 16–20.

<sup>2</sup> The ending of the first edition, quoted by Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, No. 56, is more abrupt and less artistic than that of the *Jeunes-France* volume.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 8–11.

<sup>4</sup> *Les Jeunes-France*, pp. 11–18.



sufficiently developed to be said to have a structure—the singleness of effect is achieved by a process comparable to Poe's. In the third, *Omphale* (1834), the narrative current is swift and steady. Omphale is a lady portrayed on an old piece of tapestry in a young man's room. She comes to life and loves him, but the affair is interrupted by the young man's uncle, who removes the tapestry. The account of the subsequent effort of the youth to regain the tapestry is not, however, acceptable from the short-story point of view, and, a more vital matter, the chief interest is in the picturesque setting, as the subtitle, *histoire rococo*, suggests.

These of course do not constitute all of the brief tales written by Gautier between 1831, at the beginning of his career, and 1836, but the others are nondescript, and some of them, such as *le Bol de punch*, a picture of a revel, and *Daniel Jovard*, a character sketch, are narrative only in name. The point is that during this period Gautier wrote one genuine short-story and other pieces approaching the type. As has been suggested, it is not safe to posit in this group any influence of Poe, who was only beginning to write at this period and who was not known in France, at least in translation, until the forties.<sup>1</sup> The truth seems to be that Gautier is one of several authors who were at that time creating in France, independent of foreign models, a type the identity of which with Poe's is at once fortuitous and complete<sup>2</sup>—and which I label short-story for want of authority to call it anything more distinctive. But after 1836 Gautier writes no more narratives of this form; his methods continue to develop, and, oddly enough, by the time it may be assumed that Gautier was well acquainted with Poe, he is producing stories of a stamp distinct from the American's.

The prime difference is in degree of compression. Superlative concision, the *sine qua non* of the Poe type, is no longer achieved or

<sup>1</sup> According to Retinger, *le Conte fantastique dans le Romantisme français* (Paris, 1909), p. 33, note, *The Murders in the rue Morgue* appeared anonymously as early as 1841. Cf. Lauvrière, *Poe* (Paris, 1904), p. 644, note 2; p. 276; Morris, *Cooper et Poe d'après la critique française du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1912), pp. 80, 203.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Baldwin, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 33, pointing to the dates of *la Morte amoureuse* (1836) and of *Berenice* (1835), says: "Remarkable as is the coincident appearance in Paris and in Richmond of a new literary form, it remains a coincidence." Cf. Canby, *Study of the Short Story* (New York, 1913), p. 45; "The work of their [the American writers'] French contemporaries . . . represents a parallel, not a derivative movement."



sought. What this means in actual practice will become evident upon inspection of the significant examples.

The tendency is already manifest in *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* (1838). A young Egyptian, so enamored of Cleopatra that he dares penetrate to her bath, is there discovered by the capricious queen, who accepts him as her lover with the condition that the next morning he shall die. At daybreak he pays the penalty. This would be an admirable nucleus for a short-story, and it is not difficult to imagine how the theme would be treated. The bounds of the above summary would be respected, the action would hardly begin before the capture of the youth at the bath, and would cease with the administration of the poison. In the latter case Gautier has, unconsciously, met the short-story requirement; his termination, according to that convention, is impeccable, possessing even that unexpected twist so sought after by the American twentieth-century writer, often with a resultant artificiality—though the turn which Gautier gives the narrative development is altogether probable as well as interesting: at the crucial moment Cleopatra wavers and considers preventing her lover from drinking the potion, when the unlooked-for announcement of the arrival of Mark Antony precipitates the catastrophe. The story at this point moves as rapidly as Poe's followers say it must. But here only. Gautier does not introduce the episode of the bath until he reaches the fifth of the six chapters. His preparation is leisurely. In the first chapter we learn that Cleopatra is bored, in the second this theme is elaborated and we have a first glimpse of the lover, in the third the lover becomes active to the extent of sending Cleopatra a message by an arrow, in the fourth we learn that Cleopatra is no longer bored and that the youth contemplates further activity. This easy-going preliminary, the frequent changes in viewpoint and in place, and above all the copious descriptions, are quite contrary to short-story practice.

In the case of *le Roi Candaule* (1844), Gautier appears to have been of two minds. He was evidently tempted at the outset to yield to the charm of the picturesque, and then became interested in the development of the action and gave over the static for the kinetic. An admirable narrative is developed about a central point, the inspection of the queen's beauty. The author seems to have taken,



for structural purposes, the point of view of Gyges.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning it is not apparent that the young captain is to play an important rôle, for the first chapter consists almost entirely of an elaborate description of the marriage of King Candaules and Nyssia, but, as the story moves on, more and more light is centered upon Gyges, the descriptions which, from the point of view of narration, obstruct, become less and less frequent, and after an extremely leisurely start the action becomes rapid. The preparation for the climax is adroit. It is necessary to explain concisely, when the crisis approaches, how it happens that Candaules wishes to have another man behold his wife's charms, and this is the more easily done since it has already been casually developed that he is a person of uncommon stamp and especially that his appreciation of beauty may be that of the artist as much as that of the lover. The keenness of vision which enables Nyssia to discover the eyes of Gyges as he looks into the chamber from his hiding-place is suggested early in the story. Surely such arrangement of details demonstrates what Maxime Du Camp would deny, the exercise of inventive powers by the *conteur*.<sup>2</sup> The termination of the story, after cleverly maintained suspense, is swift; climax and end are almost simultaneous. The murder done, the problem solved, a brief final paragraph gives a last glance at the central theme: "le nouveau roi se maintint sur le trône de Lydie, qu'il occupa pendant de longues années, vécut heureux et ne fit voir sa femme à personne, sachant trop ce qu'il en coûtait."<sup>3</sup>

Somewhat parallel in structure is *Arria Marcella* (1852).<sup>4</sup> A young Frenchman, at a museum in Naples, is moved by a relic of

<sup>1</sup> The following is a summary of the chapters from this angle: (i) it transpires that Gyges, by a rare chance, has seen the queen unveiled before her marriage; (ii) Gyges is the chosen confidant of the king as regards her beauty; (iii) Gyges sees her in the chamber; (iv) he is summoned to the queen to avenge her; (v) he wins her.

*Le Roi Candaule* is clearly enough an adaptation of Herodotus' story of Gyges (i. 8-12), itself an excellent example of narrative economy; the principal incidents in Gautier are those related by the Greek, and several items of the conversation between Gyges and Candaules and of that between Gyges and the queen are almost exactly reproduced. But Gautier's elaboration of the theme remains his own.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Taylor, "The Short Story in France, 1800-1900," *Edinburgh Review*, July, 1913, p. 144: "Mérimée, Gautier, Flaubert, exercised, however covertly, an art of composition; they disposed their incidents in due order of sequence; they arranged their figures with an aesthetic sense of perspective, prepared and suspended their crises, and held the balance of accent and emphasis."

<sup>3</sup> *Nouvelles*, p. 419.

<sup>4</sup> Lafcadio Hearn (*One of Cleopatra's Nights*, etc. [New York: Brentano, 1906], pp. 385-88) thinks that Gautier may have found the inspiration for *Arria Marcella* in an



Pompeii, a mass of ashes which has hardened about the form of a beautiful woman perishing in the destruction of the city. With imagination stirred by a daylight inspection of the ruins he returns there the same night, finds the conditions of eighteen hundred years ago restored, encounters the lady in question, and is welcomed by her, when her Christian father steps in, berates his daughter, and destroys the hallucination.<sup>1</sup> *Arria Marcella* is composed with no regard for the short-story principle that "the narrative must move, move, move furiously each action and every speech pointing directly toward the unknown climax,"<sup>2</sup> yet it is carefully organized in the interest of unity, with graduated and skilful focusing of the attention upon the heroine and artful alternation of suspense and swift advance. The exposition and the action proper are amalgamated by the author's conception that Arria is already acquainted with the passion of the young man and knows, by a weird interchange of the centuries, that he has admired her in the museum.<sup>3</sup>

Common to these later stories is a feature already observed in *la Morte amoureuse*, the deliberate insertion of forward-pointing remarks which serve to emphasize the central theme. The ultimate and sinister achievement of Gyges is already faintly suggested, at the very outset of *le Roi Candaule*, in the musings of the young captain: "il songeait aux enivrements de la toute-puissance, au bonheur . . . de poser le diadème sur la tête de la plus belle," "en effet, c'était bien sur ce front [de Nyssia] qu'il eût voulu poser le diadème," "l'amour qu'il éprouvait pour Nyssia lui causait une secrète terreur."<sup>4</sup> The strange adventure of the hero of *Arria Marcella* is foreshadowed in the searching glance of his companion, and in his own first impressions: "Octavien . . . semblait plus touché que ses insoucians compagnons du sort de ces trépassés de deux mille ans," "Les phrases banales du guide causèrent une vive émotion à Octavien."<sup>5</sup>

old Greek ghost story, and quotes Michelet's version of this. In any case it is clear that Gautier's narrative methods are his own.

<sup>1</sup> Observe how frequently the basic plot of a *liaison* interrupted by a third person recurs (*Omphale*, *la Morte amoureuse*, *le Pied de momie*, even, in a sense, *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* and *le Roi Candaule*).

<sup>2</sup> Canby, "Free Fiction," *Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1915, p. 61. Professor Canby urges his compatriots not to be fettered by such rules.

<sup>3</sup> The period to the story, the final sentence, deftly enhances the unity.

<sup>4</sup> *Nouvelles*, pp. 364, 365, 365, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> *Romans et Contes* (Paris: Charpentier), pp. 272, 280, 282, respectively.



Occasional emphatic sentences, such as the statement in *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, "il s'était juré . . . qu'il serait l'amant de Cléopâtre . . . ne fût-ce qu'une nuit . . . dût-il lui en coûter son corps et son âme,"<sup>1</sup> are at once a prophecy and a summary, and the progress of a story is often epitomized, with a resultant and deliberately attained narrative unity, as in Gyges' résumé of the course of events: "Un hasard lui avait fait connaître sa beauté murée à tous les yeux, entre tant de princes et de satrapes elle avait épousé précisément Candaule, le roi qu'il servait, et, par un caprice étrange qu'il ne pouvait s'empêcher de trouver presque fatal, ce roi venait faire, à lui Gygès, des confidences sur cette créature mystérieuse que personne n'approchait. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

These features become less conspicuous in three narratives of later date, much longer than those so far under discussion and yet possessed of a similar unity distinct from that of the novel. The evolution appears to be steady, from a narrative organization strictly limited, with unity consciously emphasized, to one of broader scope.

The theme of *Avatar* (1856) is a reincarnation and its consequences. Octave de Saville almost despairs at the hopelessness of his love for the Countess Labinski, who adores her husband. Thanks to the occult science of an uncanny physician, Octave's soul is transferred to the husband's body, and the husband's soul is incorporated in his. But the lover finds success as impossible as before, and the souls at his behest are being retransferred when his flies off into space, and the doctor occupies his body. The progress of the story is as steady and unhurried as that of *Arria Marcella*, but the attention is not equally concentrated. In *Arria Marcella* the single interest is in the relations of the youth and the girl of Pompeii; in *Avatar* the interest is for a considerable period in the relations of Octave and the lady, but later, when this situation is solved, much space is devoted to the resultant fate of the young man. And since, in the nature of the situation, the reader would be almost as interested in the effects of the reincarnation on the husband as in its effects on the lover, there is a considerable discussion of this. The remark of Gautier, summing up the case for Octave, "Ame obscurément sublime, il ne savait qu'aimer et mourir,"<sup>3</sup> may be regarded as the

<sup>1</sup> *Nouvelles*, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> *Romans et Contes*, p. 126.



nucleus of the tale, yet when the interest turns away from Octave the author does not hold it in check, he does not impose an adventitious unity. The theme of *Arria* calls for development within a small circle, that of *Avatar* occupies a relatively large one.<sup>1</sup>

*Avatar* is promptly followed by another story of the same order, *Jettatura* (1856). Here Gautier unfolds the consequences of the Neapolitan superstition of the evil eye when it fastens itself upon a young foreigner in love with a girl threatened with tuberculosis. At every point, in composing the tale, he has kept this situation in mind. His methods as usual are leisurely, but the narrative is held true to its course. The technique is remote from that of the short-story. The beginning, where, before the hero is introduced, there are five pages of easy-going description of the approach to Naples and some humorous animadversions on British travelers, recalls the lack of restraint of the novel.<sup>2</sup> Yet there is a deliberate and successful attempt to secure singleness of effect. Step by step the theme of the evil eye of Paul d'Aspremont is developed. The thought that there is a peculiar and pernicious power in his gaze is kept constantly before the reader. At first there are only mild suggestions. Then disasters which take place in the presence of Paul and which, the reader is gradually persuaded, may be due to the peculiar power of his eye, accumulate. At length, at a point where his gaze seems to produce catastrophes in rapid succession, Paul first hears the epithet *jettatore*! His concern over his strange situation and especially over its possible consequences for Alicia grows rapidly until the climax. Preparation for the one critical situation and the development of that situation, or in other words a climacteric elaboration of the power of Paul's eye and then an account of the result when this power is concentrated upon Alicia, such is Gautier's method.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The twelve sections of the story, as it appears in book form, are presumably the twelve units of its serial publication (cf. Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, No. 1400). Here, as well as elsewhere, Gautier deals successfully with the exigencies of the *feuilleton* system; his division into short chapters is highly logical and his final sentences sometimes epitomize with the succinctness of the short-story termination, sometimes point forward to the next stage of the tale in a way that welds the sections together.

<sup>2</sup> There are other suggestions of novel technique. Cf. p. 161, where Gautier returns to the exposition by relating events that antedate the action of the story. Such retrogression is rare in tales where a high degree of unity is the desideratum (although it is found in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*). Cf. pp. 252-55, where the author introduces supernumerary characters of somewhat meager interest as exemplifying the idiosyncrasies of the British and of almost no usefulness in advancing the narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Gautier started to cast *Jettatura* in verse, and several fragments of his work exist (cf. Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, No. 2306). The beginning of the narrative is more direct, the tone more sinister, than in the prose form.

*Spirite* (1865), one of his last pieces of fiction, closes the series of distinctive tales I am here considering. It is of particular interest in that it was written under the influence of Poe,<sup>1</sup> with whose work the author was now thoroughly familiar,<sup>2</sup> and yet, as regards structure, is closer to the *Avatar* type than to *la Morte amoureuse*.

Once more, maximum compression is not sought. The essential theme, the relations of Guy de Malivert and the spirit of a woman who had already loved him in the flesh, without his knowing it, is given due prominence, yet Gautier does not refrain from dealing with the immediate ramifications. In addition to Malivert and *Spirite* two characters play rôles of some importance, Madame d'Ymbercourt, the flesh-and-blood rival, and the Baron de Feroë, a mystic who is able to explain to Guy the manifestations of his intangible mistress. Both are required in Gautier's manipulation of the subject, the first as a foil, the second as an interpreter. The scene is allowed to shift, the point of view changes. The fourteenth chapter, wherein the main issue waits while the jealousy of Madame d'Ymbercourt is healed by *Spirite*, would be considered by Poe an unpardonable interpolation.<sup>3</sup> Even from a more liberal point of view certain features may be considered to clog the narrative, for example the long description by *Spirite*, who is recounting her mortal life, of the ball where she did not dance with Malivert.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it is clear that Gautier felt the need of a certain degree of narrative concision: when the situation becomes critical the story is made to move rapidly, the writer comes promptly to the essential,<sup>5</sup> and once he remarks: "Il est inutile de décrire avec détail les impressions de voyage de Malivert; ce serait sortir du cadre de ce récit."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Retinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 77. Gautier mentions Poe in the course of the story (pp. 4, 33-34).

<sup>2</sup> I find no reference by Gautier to Poe earlier than 1858 (cf. *Portraits contemporains* [Paris, 1898], p. 52). From this time forward allusions are frequent, as if Gautier had suddenly become aware of the American, perhaps through Baudelaire's translations (1856). In his article on Baudelaire, Gautier quotes, without comment, a remark by Poe which contains in essence the latter's short-story theory (*Portraits et souvenirs littéraires* [Paris, 1892], p. 191).

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Gautier has not, in the Poe manner, "deliberately preconceived" the whole story, to judge from the following (*Vacances du Lundi* [Paris, 1907], p. 75): "nous voilà installé au sein d'un doux et charmant loisir, cherchant sous les grands marronniers la fin de *Spirite*."

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the explanation at the close of this description may be considered faintly apologetic (*Spirite* [Paris, 1907], p. 134).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218. Observe, however, that a page of description follows.



This note of conscious construction is rare in Gautier, either in his stories or in his critical writing. If we now examine the latter, it will become evident that he can hardly be said to have, in the case of fiction, any doctrine.

Even as regards terminology he is careless. He called *Spirite* a *nouvelle*. *Avatar* and *Jettatura* first appeared as *contes*,<sup>1</sup> but they are the longest stories, and stand at the head, in the subsequent collection entitled *Romans et Contes* (1863). In his autobiography, referring to his activities in the field of fiction, he writes: "Sans être romancier de profession je n'en ai pas moins bâclé, en mettant à part les nouvelles, une douzaine de romans: *les Jeunes-France*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *Fortunio*, *les Roués innocents*, *Militona*, *la Belle Jenny*, *Jean et Jeannette*, *Avatar*, *Jettatura*, *le Roman de la momie*, *Spirite*, *le Capitaine Fracasse*."<sup>2</sup> Here is a list which includes novels, tales that approach the short-story type, and tales that bear another stamp; they have in common merely the fact that they are relatively long. There is apparently no distinction between *roman* and *nouvelle*, unless it be one of length, in the following remark: "Il y a douze ou quinze ans, M. Jules Janin publia, dans *la Revue des Deux Mondes*, une nouvelle d'une centaine de pages—on n'avait pas encore inventé, en ce temps-là, les romans qui n'en finissent pas—une nouvelle, disons-nous, intitulée *le Piédestal*."<sup>3</sup> And certainly little difference between *nouvelle* and *conte* is recognized by Gautier when he uses the two words in the same sentence of the same story.<sup>4</sup>

A specific problem of narration is discussed by him to some purpose in his article on Karr. Of the digressions in the novels of the latter he writes:

<sup>1</sup> Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, Nos. 1400, 1421.

<sup>2</sup> *Portraits contemporains*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France* (Paris, 1859), VI, 5. *Le Piédestal* was published in 1832, not in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* but in the *Revue de Paris*. Janin, in the course of the story, makes a significant distinction between *nouvelle* and *roman* (XLIII, 103): "Ici si je faisais un roman et non pas une histoire, j'aurais un bien beau sujet de développements de mœurs. J'arrangerais à loisir mon récit, le conduisant en habile écuyer à travers toutes les difficultés du terrain, changeant souvent ma voie. . . .

"Mais il n'en est pas de la *nouvelle* comme du roman. La nouvelle, c'est une course au clocher. . . . On va toujours au galop, on ne connaît pas d'obstacles; on traverse le buisson d'épines, on franchit le fossé, on brise le mur, on se brise les os, on va tant que va son histoire." In performance, Janin proves somewhat irresponsible. His composition is lax. But the metaphor brings out effectively the essential directness of the *nouvelle* type, and, although Gautier passes it over in silence, suggests the economy of the short-story art at which he himself was trying his hand in 1832.

<sup>4</sup> *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, I, 254, 299; Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, No. 830.

Un mot fait éclore un chapitre, et malgré toutes leurs folles brindilles éparpillées à droite et à gauche, ces digressions n'en tiennent pas moins à la tige commune par des filaments et des nervures invisibles. Relevez le feuillage de la main, et vous verrez la branche qui s'attache solidement au tronc; toute action, si elle a réellement une portée philosophique, fait lever une moisson de pensées sous lesquelles il lui arrive quelquefois de disparaître comme la terre aride du sillon sous le manteau d'or des épis.—Lequel vaut mieux de l'épi ou du sillon, de la feuille ou de la branche?<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the principle was applied by Gautier himself, although with modifications and a limited *portée philosophique*, and perhaps the remark is the inspiration of Du Camp when he says of Gautier's workmanship: "Le sujet . . . est toujours d'une extrême simplicité, mais l'écrivain a su le parer et l'envelopper, parfois jusqu'à le faire disparaître, d'une forme élégante et touffue."<sup>2</sup> Similar praise of inherent unity, deserving of quotation in a discussion of Gautier's own procedure, is found in his encomium of Fenimore Cooper:

Les plus beaux romans de Cooper sont composés avec des éléments d'une simplicité extrême. . . . Les personnages n'apparaissent que comme des points blancs et rouges sur le fond d'outre-mer des lointains, ou sur le vert sombre et dur des ébéniers centenaires. Cependant, malgré leur petitesse relative, par leur énergie et leur résolution, ils dominent cette gigantesque nature, et c'est là la source de l'intérêt sublime et profond qui s'attache au *Dernier des Mohicans*, à *la Prairie*. L'orgueil humain est intimement flatté de cette victoire et s'en réjouit par esprit de corps. Cette disposition rendait Fenimore Cooper plus propre que tout autre à réussir dans le roman maritime. . . . L'idée qui éclate à chaque page est celle exprimée par le proverbe breton: "Ma barque est si petite et la mer est si grande!" De là vient tout l'intérêt.<sup>3</sup>

But these acute bits of criticism stand almost alone. An able practitioner, Gautier, as I have said, was not given to theorizing about fiction.

It is therefore upon the examination of the structure of his stories that conclusions must largely be based. Two types appear to have been evolved, a form exceedingly compact, best represented by *la Morte amoureuse*, and another less restrained but still highly unified,

<sup>1</sup> *Portraits contemporains*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Du Camp, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Souvenirs de théâtre, d'art et de critique* (Paris, 1904), pp. 21-22. This is part of a page of criticism of Cooper which occurs in an article on Eugène Sue first published in the *Chronique de Paris* in 1836. It is not listed by Professor Morris, *op. cit.*



of which *Arria Marcella* and *Jettatura* are characteristic examples. The one develops out of the other; the first group is the result of an early tendency culminating in 1836, the second includes some of the best work of the author's maturity.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, many of his narratives do not yield to this classification. Some are not primarily narrative but descriptive;<sup>2</sup> some are genuine novels,<sup>3</sup> some, within a narrower compass, retain the characteristic structural complexity of the novel.<sup>4</sup> Even such a tale as *le Chevalier double*, in spite of its strongly emphasized central theme, might be considered a novel *in parvo*, were it not unreasonable to apply modern narrative standards to a story which aims at and achieves the characteristics of an ancient legend.<sup>5</sup> *La Toison d'or* is an intermediate form. The story is an organic whole; the central theme is the quest of Tiburce, a youth who, having admired womankind only from the point of view of a connoisseur of the fine arts, only in painting and sculpture, determines to seek a flesh-and-blood mistress and, inspired by Rubens, goes to Flanders. At the beginning the interest is fastened upon the question whether Tiburce will find a blond maiden, then it is deflected to the infatuation of Tiburce for Rubens' Magdalene, and ultimately to that development of the character of Gretchen which results in the final solution, with the affections of Tiburce satisfied and his power as an artist revealed. In other words, the attention is not focused. It is not difficult to imagine the expansion of *la Toison d'or* into a full-sized novel, where the character development, no longer compressed into a few lines, would be vastly more convincing; on the other hand, the story could hardly be given a unity comparable to that of *le Roi Candaule* or of *Avatar* without fundamental revision.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the stories discussed, *la Chaîne d'or* (1837) and especially *la Mille et deuxième nuit* (1842) belong to the second group.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Pied de momie*, *le Pavillon sur l'eau*, even *Fortunio*, which is a cross-section of a peculiarly sumptuous and voluptuous life with the central figure hardly a man but a personification of a picturesque lavishness.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, *le Roman de la momie*, etc. The plot of the second is relatively simple. Cf. the simplicity of plot of *la Croix de Berny*, written by Gautier in collaboration with Mme de Girardin, Sandeau, and Méry.

<sup>4</sup> *Militona*, *le Berger*, etc. So also *les Roués innocents*, and *Jean et Jeannette*, although in each case the elaborations develop from a single nucleus.

<sup>5</sup> Other legends and fairy-stories by Gautier approach more closely, in narrative simplicity and concentration of attention, the types under discussion. Cf. the exquisite *Enfant aux souliers de pain* and *Nid de rossignols*, and the mediocre *Oreiller d'une jeune fille*.

But from the whole mass of works of fiction published by Gautier, the brief tales analyzed here, from *la Morte amoureuse* to *Spirite*, emerge as structurally unique.

The credit is probably due to Gautier alone. The likeness of some of the earlier stories to the tales Poe was producing at about the same time in America<sup>1</sup> does not warrant inferences, it has been observed, as to the influence of Poe. Equally fortuitous and no less interesting is the parallel between the later products of Gautier and the nineteenth-century German *Novelle*.

A purely casual remark of the author in *Arria Marcella* that he is presenting "le simple récit d'une aventure bizarre et peu croyable, quoique vraie,"<sup>2</sup> is nearly identical with Goethe's famous definition: "Was ist eine *Novelle* anders als eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit?"<sup>3</sup> *Aventure* may be set off against *Begebenheit*, *bizarre et peu croyable* against *unerhörte*, *vraie* against *sich ereignete*, *simple* against *eine*. Indeed, Gautier's statement, put alongside of Goethe's, illuminates the latter, which, "the quintessential result of an investigation . . . conducted intermittently for over thirty years,"<sup>4</sup> is cast in somewhat oracular form. There is a meager possibility that Gautier was acquainted with this definition. It is a fact that he knew the *Wahlverwandtschaften*,<sup>5</sup> which includes the story of *Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder*, the first of Goethe's narratives to be presented to the public under the express title *Novelle*. But there is not the requisite evidence to substantiate a belief that Gautier was inspired by the German, and the remark which so neatly corresponds to Goethe's appears to be a felicitous accident.

<sup>1</sup> It may also be affirmed that there is a resemblance to Hawthorne in some of Gautier's work. In fact, the following criticism of Hawthorne, by Robert Louis Stevenson (*Essay on Hugo*, p. 20), is applicable, in its entirety, to the author of *Jettatura*: "There is a unity, an unwavering creative purpose, about some at least of Hawthorne's romances, that impresses itself on the most indifferent reader; and the very restrictions and weaknesses of the man served perhaps to strengthen the vivid and single impression of his works." Gautier was acquainted with the fiction of Hawthorne (cf. *Portraits contemporains*, p. 157) and had been particularly impressed by the conception of a garden of poisonous flowers in *Rappacini's Daughter*, a story kindred in structure to *Jettatura*, *Avatar*, etc. (cf. *Histoire du Romantisme*, p. 353; *Fusains et eaux-fortes* [Paris, 1907], pp. 308-11).

<sup>2</sup> *Romans et Contes*, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, January 29, 1827.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, "Goethe's Theory of the *Novelle*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXX, 236. This article and Professor Mitchell's thoroughgoing study, *Heyse and his Predecessors in the Theory of the Novelle* (Frankfurt, 1915), are the principal source of the following remarks on the German definitions.

<sup>5</sup> *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, I, 193; IV, 337.



In practice, the epithet *vraie* is not equivalent to Goethe's *sich ereignete*. For obviously the adventure in *Arria Marcella*, or that in *Avatar*, is not true, could not actually happen, in the same sense as the events of *Der Prokurator* or of *Ferdinand*. Closer to Goethe in this respect are *Jettatura* and *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, although these sin against a principle enunciated by one of Goethe's spokesmen: "Ich leugne nicht, dass ich die Geschichten nicht liebe, die unsere Einbildungskraft immer in fremde Länder nötigen. Muss denn alles in Italien und Sizilien, im Orient geschehen? Sind denn Neapel, Palermo und Smyrna die einzigen Orte, wo etwas Interessantes vorgehen kann?"<sup>1</sup> As regards unity and novelty, however, Gautier's stories fully meet the German's requirements. Likewise, Gautier's leisurely expositions find a counterpart in such stories as *Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder* and *Der Prokurator*, his occasionally appended codas a corresponding feature in *Ferdinand*.

Two other definitions, by Tieck and by Paul Heyse, stand out in the ponderous mass of German criticism, and both of these have their application here. Tieck, writing in 1829, insists with Goethe upon unity and novelty and develops independently the theory that the prime requisite is a single turning-point "von welchem aus sie [die Geschichte] sich unerwartet völlig umkehrt, und doch natürlich, dem Charakter und den Umständen angemessen, die Folge entwickelt. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Apparently Tieck would give his entire approval to *le Roi Candaule*, where the action turns upon the discovery by the queen that Gyges is inspecting her beauty, and to *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, developed about the compact which Cleopatra makes with the young Egyptian. In some of the other Gautier tales, such as *Avatar* and *Spirite*, there is no prominent *Wendepunkt*, but perhaps the theorist would be liberal in his interpretation, for he states that each of the *Novelas exemplares* of Cervantes possesses such a turning-point, yet investigation of these shows, I think, that it is frequently not easy to determine which decisive act shall be so denominated.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Goethe, *Werke*, Weimarer Ausgabe, XVIII, 190, quoted by Mitchell, *Heyse and his Predecessors*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>*Schriften* (Berlin: Reimer, 1829), XI, p. lxxxvi. The theory is discussed by Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 ff.

<sup>3</sup>Closest to the *Novelle* type are *La Gitanilla* and *El Celoso Extremeño*. In the *Coloquio de los Perros* are one or two comments on problems of narration; cf. especially where Cipion urges Berganza to refrain from digressions (p. 340 of the Leipzig, 1869,

More specific and of special application to Gautier is the definition made by Paul Heyse in order to set a standard for his *Deutscher Novellenschatz*:

Im allgemeinen . . . halten wir . . . an der Regel fest der Novelle den Vorzug zu geben, deren Grundmotiv sich am deutlichsten abrundet und . . . etwas Eigenartiges, Spezifisches schon in der blossen Anlage verrät. Eine *starke Silhouette*—um . . . einen Ausdruck der Malersprache zu Hilfe zu nehmen—dürfte dem, was wir im eigentlichen Sinne *Novelle* nennen, nicht fehlen, ja wir glauben, die Probe auf die Trefflichkeit eines novellistischen Motivs werde in den meisten Fällen darin bestehen, ob der Versuch gelingt, den Inhalt in wenige Zeilen zusammenzufassen, in der Weise, wie die alten Italiener ihren Novellen kurze Überschriften gaben, die dem Kundigen schon im Keim den spezifischen Wert des Themas verraten.<sup>1</sup>

This is close to Gautier's conception of brief-narrative unity as exemplified in the series of stories under discussion,<sup>2</sup> the last of which was published five years before the promulgation of Heyse's theory (1871). That is to say, here again are narrative methods parallel and independent.<sup>3</sup>

Probably Gautier was not the only Frenchman to produce during this period stories comparable in form to the *Novelle*. This structural method would seem sufficiently elastic to lend itself—perhaps with results not so lurid and of deeper literary import—to the purposes of authors in power and doctrine quite different from him.

edition): "Quiero decir que la sigas [la novela] de golpe, sin que la hagas que parezca pulpo, según la vas añadiendo colas." Gautier refers several times to Cervantes' stories, but not critically (cf. *Voyage en Espagne* [Paris, 1899], pp. 118, 299; *Guide au Louvre*, p. 274).

<sup>1</sup> *Deutscher Novellenschatz* (München, 1871), Einleitung, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>2</sup> Heyse quotes, for illustration of his theory, Boccaccio's abstract of the ninth *Novella* of the fifth day: "Federigo degli Alberighi ama e non è amato; e in cortesia spendendo si consuma, e rimangli un sol falcone, il quale, non avendo altro, dà a mangiare alla sua donna venutagli a casa: la qual ciò sappiendo, mutata d'animo, il prende per marito e fallo ricco."

Gautier's stories may be summed up quite as succinctly. Cf. the abstracts given in the course of this article. Cf. also the lines of Swinburne which epitomize *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* (*Poems* [London, 1904], III, 64):

And that great night of love more strange than this,  
When she that made the whole world's bale and bliss  
Made king of all the world's desire a slave,  
And killed him in mid kingdom with a kiss.

<sup>3</sup> Speculation about the reasons for these resemblances between Gautier's work and the short-story and the *Novelle* types remains idle until more is known about the French field. Apparently the conditions of modern literature tend to develop two forms of brief tale, as in English where we have not only the close-knit "short-story," but the more loosely woven—and clumsily named—"long short-story."



For Gautier, in any case, one point remains to be made. His critics,<sup>1</sup> maintaining that he is above all a poet and a painter, like to stress either the lyric or the pictorial element in his stories, and grant him small skill in sheer narration. Without doubt their view that fiction was of secondary interest to him is correct. Yet he accepted its conditions more whole-heartedly than they think. There is a suggestion of this truth in his letter to Sainte-Beuve: "Si j'avais possédé la moindre fortune personnelle, je me serais livré uniquement à *l'amour du vert laurier*; mais dans la prose où je suis tombé, j'ai toujours défendu les intérêts de l'art. . . ."<sup>2</sup> And the evidence proves that the structure of many of his tales is far from being either haphazard or spontaneous, that the degree of unity he sometimes attains is the result of deliberate plan, that after all, as a narrator, he is no mean figure.

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<sup>1</sup> Faguet, Sainte-Beuve, Lafcadio Hearn, *et al.*

<sup>2</sup> Lovenjoul, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p. xx.





